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ABSTRACT

For one teacher switching from teaching first grade to teaching kindergarten, giving her students knowledge and power was her goal. Specifically, she wanted her students to benefit from the power and freedom that literacy holds. This paper relates how the teacher came to choose balanced literacy as a well rounded approach to teaching communication arts. The paper first describes balanced literacy; cites the key principles of a balanced literacy program; and lists the components of a balanced literacy program (divided into the major headings of reading, writing, and language development). It then discusses under reading, the components of reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading and literature circles, and independent reading and buddy reading. Under writing, it discusses modeled writing, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, structured writing, and independent writing. The paper points out that all of these components, while considered separately for the sake of clarity, are in actuality fluid in nature, with the benefits of one component flowing into the others. It also briefly discusses language experiences and literacy centers as additional components of the balanced literacy program. The paper concludes with a reminiscence about the teacher's first week teaching kindergarten and notes that research has substantiated the need for teachers to use a balanced approach to teaching reading and writing to develop the full potential of their students. (NKA)

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Balanced Literacy in a Kindergarten Class.

by Lisa Gonfiantini

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BALANCED LITERACY IN A KINDERGARTEN CLASS

by Lisa Gonfiantini

Why I Chose Balanced Literacy For My Kindergarten Class

During my mental preparation last summer, for changing from teaching first grade to kindergarten, I gave a lot of thought to how I would go about instructing my new students in Communication Arts. The importance of that impending decision hit home with full force after reading My Name's Not Susie : A Life Transformed by Literacy, by Sharon Jean Hamilton. In the book the author discusses the ultimate power literacy has to change a person's life. She specifically discusses its affect on her own life. "As I saw it, literacy had first of all enabled me to realize there were many ways to live my life beyond the limitations my parents and my immediate culture wanted to impose, and second, had empowered me to work toward whatever goals I envisioned." (1995 p. 112)

That knowledge and power is what all good teachers want to give to their students. It is the main reason why most people become educators in the first place. No matter how much we get caught up in the short term parameters of our instruction; will it help them to meet the standards? Will they pass the test? Are they being prepared for next year? It is ultimately the power of knowledge that we want to pass on. Specifically, in this case, it is the power and freedom literacy holds that I want my students to benefit from.

This may seem overly dramatic to some people considering that I teach kindergarten but I disagree. It is with young children that we can make the most impact. Also we must remember that children strive to communicate with others as soon as they become aware that they are not alone. "The children in my class took their first steps in communicating years ago, the first time they cried in order to have their needs met. And their literacy training began almost as early. "Early literacy learning begins almost from the moment children are born. They encounter the symbols of literacy in the world - signs for stores and restaurants and begin to connect them with their meaning."(Fountas and

Pinnell p. 4) I want to do all I can to ensure that this process of literacy learning, with all the possibilities it brings, continues smoothly for my students and advances to as high a level as they are developmentally capable of achieving.

In order to do this my students must first be made to see language as a miraculous tool for them to use and they must be opened up to see the wonder of language in all its forms. A Whole Language approach would meet this criteria. However research suggests that it does not give children the tools needed to control language. (Kelly 1997). In discussing essential components of a balanced, comprehensive approach to teaching reading, authors Poindexter and Oliver cite inclusion of an explicit skills program is essential in addressing the needs of emergent readers (1998). Having witnessed, first hand, the almost insurmountable difficulties encountered by someone who lacks those skills, and its subsequent crippling effect, I am extremely cognizant of the necessity for children to learn specific reading and writing strategies. No matter how much they learn to enjoy language unless they develop the necessary capabilities and skills to understand it, written language will be an unrequited love for them. Research has shown that children who undergo training in phonemic awareness become better readers and writers than those who do not receive similar training. (Poindexter and Oliver, 1998; Juel Griffith, & Gough, 1996; K. Diegmueller, 1996; P.L Griffith, 1991). However, I am leery of falling into the trap of depending primarily on a skills based or phonics program to teach reading. "Language decontextualized from the heart and soul of what kids do and hope to be able to do with language are too abstract, too cognitively distant from the learner's experiential center, to be helpful." notes Hamilton (p.106).

Many teachers have always known what researchers have only recently become aware of, and that is that children need it all. They need the explicit instruction in decoding and strategies and they need to be immersed in good literature and have good reading and writing strategies modeled for them. Additionally they need the time to practice it all. In a Joint Statement of Position, the National Association for the Education

of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA) write, "Learning to read and write is a complex, multifaceted process that requires a wide variety of instructional approaches."(p. 1)

NAEYC and IRA have publicly stated their support for a balanced instructional program in their position paper (p. 4) and with good reason, "The emerging literacy research suggests that young children should be actively engaged in a variety of literacy activities which will support their development from their earliest years (Wiencek, Joyce, Cipielewski, Vazzano, Sturker, 1998, p.10). Recent research supports balanced programs as providing optimal benefits (Rycik, 1997; Liebling, Cheryl Rappaport, 1998).

What Is Balanced Literacy?

Balanced Literacy is a well rounded fluid approach to teaching Communication Arts. It is not a *fixed* approach or a *specific* program or curriculum but rather a "philosophical perspective about what kinds of reading knowledge children should develop and how those kinds of knowledge can be attained." (Fitzgerald, 1999 p.100). It combines the holistic and skills approach with the idea that each method has its own merits and place in the classroom (Tompkins 1997, p. 35). It enables teachers to meet more fully all of the language arts needs of their students. "Balanced instruction combines the best elements from phonics instruction and the whole-language approach. Children are explicitly taught the relationship between letters and sounds in a systematic fashion, but they are being read to and reading interesting stories and writing at the same time." (Diegmueller, 1996, p. 1).

Key Principals of a Balanced Literacy Program

After examining a variety of diverse reading and writing programs that lay claim to balance Jill Fitzgerald has come up with three principals of balance:

* "The teacher arranges instruction and reading opportunities so that the children can acquire or create as many kinds of reading knowledge as possible." (1999, p. 103)

* "Instructional methods sometimes considered to be opposites or contrasts are used so that the positive features of each, especially those features not present in the other way of teaching, can permit the fullest array of possible learning to occur." (1999, p. 104).

* A wide range of reading materials are used in the classroom in order to meet a variety of knowledge goals. These may include classic literature books to encourage a love a reading and develop greater comprehension and trade books, easy readers and predictable books for word identification and concepts of print. (1999, p. 104).

Components of a Balanced Literacy Program

In following with those principals stated by Fitzgerald there are several components which must be included in a literacy program in order for it to be considered balanced. (Fountas, Pinnell, 1996; Tompkins, 1997; Cunningham, Hall, Sigmon, 1999, Strickland, D., 1990; Holdaway, D.,1982). The components needed for emergent readers, mentioned most often by authors knowledgeable in this field, can be divided into the major headings of Reading, Writing, and Language Development. Additionally they are viewed from the amount of support provided by the teacher. Ranging from those that require the most support to those that require the least. This scaffolding enables the children to perform tasks at the highest level they are capable of. (Bodrova And Leong, 1996).

The components included under reading are; *reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading* and *literature circles.* While *modeled writing, interactive writing, shared writing, guided writing and independent writing* fall under the umbrella category of writing. All of these components, while being considered separately for the sake of clarity, are in actuality fluid in nature, with the benefits of one component flowing into the others. "There can be no reading development which does not involve writing development, and vice versa" (Margaret Moustafa as cited in Literacy Instructional Guide of the NY City Board of Education, issued Fall 2000).

Reading

- **Read Aloud**

The benefits gained by reading aloud to children is far reaching and widely documented. (Cochran-Smith,1984; Trelease, J.; 1989; Travers, 1993). At least once a day the teacher reads a story aloud to the children which is above their reading level. "This reading to is a very important process because it provides a rich context in which children can experience more complex language structures, story lines, characters, and plot development. Natural conversations and group discussions about the book help develop higher levels of thinking and a deeper understanding of life experiences." (Williams 1996 p. 12). Reading good books to children also allows the teacher to share her enthusiasm for books with the children and cultivates children's love of books.

In my classroom read alouds can, and often do, take place throughout the day. Sometimes they are used as motivation before a lesson or in order to recall prior knowledge about a topic. An information book about apples was read before a science lesson which involved apples and The Three Bears was read before a math lesson about size comparison. I find that most of the children enjoy hearing stories in a variety of genres. Our group morning meeting time is usually begun with a good story or poem. It is a good way to bring the whole class together to share in the same piece of literature. Immediately after lunch the children come together for a more formal read aloud. After reading the class takes part in grand conversations, teacher facilitated book discussions, in order to talk about the book and share the experience. (Tompkins 1997).

Our most intense Grand Conversation to date took place after reading a version of The Little Red Hen. The children became highly involved in discussing whether or not the Little Red Hen was a nice character. It is at time like that that you can almost visibly see the children's comprehension abilities, vocabulary and their enthusiasm for, and love of, reading sky rocket.

- **Shared Reading**

In shared reading the teacher reads an enlarged text of a poem, song, or book and the children join in where and when they can. Children learn important concepts of print in this manner and also get the "feel of reading." A mini lesson on a particular point is taught using text the children have become familiar with through shared reading. According to The Wright Group, a major publisher of Big Books, the goal of the first reading is to let children enjoy and understand the story. The goal of the second reading is to have children participate more in the reading process. The goal of subsequent readings is to focus on developing children's independence, forging a deeper understand and fostering enjoyment. (Williams, 1996)

I have witnessed the steady movement toward achieving all of these goals while doing shared reading lessons with my class. With the support of the group each child is able to practice reading skills on her or his own level. I have witnessed children inching up closer to the book so they could use their fingers to help them read along and I have seen other children who were silent at previous shared reading lesson begin to join in "reading" the repeated refrains. The fact that the children voluntarily go back to these texts over and over again proves to me that they are meeting a need in the children.

- **Guided Reading and Literature Circles**

According to Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell guided reading is the heart of a balanced literacy program. (1996 p.1) In guided reading the teacher meets with small groups of children who are on the same reading level and supports them in their use of a variety of strategies as they read complete texts on their instructional level. "The purpose of guided reading is to enable children to use and develop strategies on the run." (Fountas & Pinnell 1996 p.2) The opportunities to asses children's reading abilities presented by guided reading groups is very valuable. "The teacher is able to asses children far more effectively in small groups as well as address individual needs. (Williams p.13)

I selected small groups of children to meet within a guided reading group based upon a common literacy skill which they need practice in or are ready to learn. At this point in time I have one group who are working with wordless picture books in order to learn how to properly handle a book and to learn basic concepts such as left to right page sequencing. The rest of the children are reading books on levels A or B, based on Fountas and Pinnell's classification system. (1996 p.117). The books have a very simple story line. The text is directly supported by the pictures and the topics are familiar to the children. The print is clear, easy to see and the spaces between the words are large enough so that the children do not have trouble pointing to the words. Additionally a limited number of high frequency words are repeated throughout the text and the text itself is often between one to four lines, with no more than one to two sentences per illustration or page. These books lend themselves to supporting book behaviors as listed on p. 119 of Guided Reading: Good First Teaching For All Children by Fountas and Pinnell:

Handling books.
Controlling left to right movement and return sweep.
Noticing and interpreting detail in pictures.
Using oral language in relation to the text.
Matching word by word.
Paying close attention to print - noticing some features of letters and words.
Locating familiar and new words.
Remembering and using language patterns.
Using Knowledge of language syntax as a source of information.
Using oral language in combination with pointing.
Predicting what makes sense.
Self monitoring.

The children in my class all love to be called to a guided reading group because they know they will get to read a new book and they know that they will be able to keep their new book in their personal book bag. These personal book bags are used by the children, during free reading time, alone or with a buddy who has the same book. I discourage the children to read these guided reading books to other children who are

unfamiliar with it because I may want to use the same book with that child and I prefer that the guided reading books be unfamiliar to the children so I can asses their skills more accurately .

When children reach the level of independent readers they should be moved from guided reading into Literacy Circles which is also sometimes referred to as Book Clubs. In Literacy Circles small groups of children who have selected the same book to read meet to discuss it, thereby extending their comprehension of the story. "These characteristics exemplify the three key features of literature circles- choice, literature, and response." (Tompkins, 1997 p. 388)

As my children are emergent readers we do not use literature circles. However, the "grand conversations" they are involved in after hearing a story read aloud is helping to prepare them for their eventual use in another grade.

- **Independent Reading and Buddy Reading**

During independent reading the children read self selected books, poems and charted songs independently or with a partner. Some of the reading done during this time is from a leveled collection of books, or the children's personal book bags to ensure that they are getting practice reading on their independent reading level. "The goal of all classroom reading is to develop readers who select and read books independently (Fountas and Pinnell 1996, p. 59)

Every morning the children put away their books, hang up their coats, and choose what they will read. It is a nice way to ease into the day and it allows me a few minutes to go around the room, listen to them, and notice what they have chosen to read. At this point in the children's literacy development they are not reading silently since they still need the support of hearing themselves say the words aloud and they are more often then not approximating the text. However during this time the children are also practicing the skills that they do posses, increasing their comprehension, fostering their self confidence

by seeing themselves as readers, and are reading for enjoyment or information. (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Williams 1996; Fisher 1998). Not a bad way to start a school day.

Writing

- **Modeled Writing**

In modeled writing the teacher does all the writing and the class observes. The purpose of modeled writing is the demonstration of good writing strategies. (Cunningham, Hall & Sigmon; 1999 p. 87; Tompkins 1997 p. 23). The teacher thinks aloud as she writes on large chart paper or an overhead projector. Strategies such as sounding out words, using inventive spelling and looking for words within the classroom environment (poems, charts, word walls etc.) are incorporated into the mini-lesson.

I briefly model writing almost every day just before the children go off for independent journal writing. Before I write I have a specific Minilesson in mind similar to those listed above or others such as using our editor's check list or using a finger to remember to space words or how to think through a piece of writing when you get stuck. At the very beginning of the year I used a method mentioned by author Bobbi Fisher, in Joyful Learning in Kindergarten. I purposely modeled writing using each of the writing stages to ensure that all of the children, who are on a variety of levels, knew that their writing no matter what stage it was valuable and would be accepted. The children seem to enjoy the stories I write. They are usually about something in my life they would not normally know about such as trips I have taken or stories about my family or pets. Occasionally I write stories about some of the children in our class which they always get excited about. After the writing they are usually very quick about pointing out the good things I have done as a writer and equally quick to point out any errors they think I have made.

- **Shared Writing**

In shared writing, as in shared reading, the children begin to take a more active role. The teacher and students work together to compose a text, with the teacher doing

the writing and the children suggesting words and sentences to be written. (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Tompkins, 1997) The benefits of shared writing as listed by Fountas and Pinnell 1996 p. 23 are:

Demonstrates how writing works

Provides opportunities to draw attention to letters, words and sounds

Enables children's ideas to be recorded

Creates written language resources for the classroom.

I began to do shared writing with the class on the first day of school. I asked the children to tell me their name and something they wanted to do in Kindergarten. I then wrote out their responses on large chart paper. Initially only a few children spoke up but by the third and last day of this activity all the children had watched as their name and what they had said they wanted to learn got written down. I also used shared writing for experience charts, literature responses, and on an individual basis during writing process especially at the very beginning of the year. However we now use interactive writing, in some form, for these activities. One of my students still needs a lot of support and refuses to attempt to do any writing during writing process so for now with this child I still write down the sentence or two that hi dictates to me after drawing a picture.

- **Interactive Writing**

In interactive writing children's involvement increases even more. With this method the children continue to take an active role in composing the text but they also participate in it's actual physical construction. The children take turns writing familiar letters and words. This is often known as "sharing the Pen." (Tompkins, 1997; Button, Johnson, & Furgerson 1996; Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). The teacher helps to make sure all the words are spelled correctly and that proper written language conventions are being followed. The four purposes of interactive writing according to Tompkins (1997 p.25) are:

To practice writing high frequency words

To practice phonics and spelling skills

To successfully write text that the children could not do independently

To have the children share their reading and writing expertise with classmates.

Additional benefits which are mentioned in Fountas & Pinnell (1996) include, "Demonstrates concepts of print, early strategies, and how words work; Helps children understand building up and breaking down processes in reading and writing; Provides written language resources in the room.(p. 23)

Much of the group writing that we are doing in class is done in an interactive manner. These include lists, letters, story boards, story innovations and additions to our class news. Each day after reading the class news I ask the children what news they have. After listening to several children tell their news we choose one or two of the spoken sentences to add to our class news. Our first interactive writing started in the second week of school. Each day we would choose on of the children's names out of a box and that child would become our star student. As suggested in Joyful Learning in Kindergarten, we then wrote a sentence about that day's star student. Even though it was the beginning of the year many of the children were able to participate. Many of them knew how to write their own names and were able to make the letters in their names when needed for other words.

- **Guided Writing**

Some authors describe guided writing as a teacher structured activity (Tompkins, 1997) while others think of it more as the aid given to children by the teacher as the children free write or follow the writing process (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996; Williams, 1995,). For the sake of clarity I will refer to the first type of guided writing as structured writing and will include the second type under Independent Writing.

Structured Writing

In structured writing the teacher sets up the activity and supervises as the children write. (Tompkins, 1997, p. 27). Structure writing is often used to provide practice in print conventions. "It provides an arena in which children can practice such things as basic grammar and spelling conventions, helping them to internalize the most common structures of our language."(p. 40). My classes first attempts at structured writing included using inventive spelling to make lists of words with specific letter sounds. Recently I have begun to use the story pattern found in a particular book or poem we are reading for structured writing practice. After reading Plop! by June Melser, I used the recurring writing structure 'I can see the...' as the structured writing prompt. After practicing filling in the sentence as a group the children were told to copy the beginning and to think of their own ending. Different children came up with different strategies in order to come up with a last word. Several of the children used inventive spelling with their last word, others used words found in the room such as **pig** taken from the alphabet chart and **cubbie** taken from a label. Copying words off of chart paper, or a board is still a difficult task for some of my students so for them I usually hand out an individual copy of the writing prompt. For two of the children I write out the beginning part of the sentence directly onto their paper and have them trace over it. I usually schedule structured writing two or three times per week and alternate it with a literature response.

For a literature response the children answer a question about a story they have just listened to, or read, during shared reading, by drawing a picture and or writing using inventive spelling. The questions to be responded to, at this time of year, are very basic such as write about your favorite character or write about your favorite part of the story.

Independent Writing

During independent writing the children choose their own topic to write about. These may include original stories, retellings, informational pieces, labels, speech balloons

etc. Independent writing provides time for children to practice writing procedures. It provides authentic literacy experiences. It builds ability to write words and use punctuation and it aids in the development of life long writers (Fountas & Pinnell 1996 p23) "Through independent writing experiences children come to view themselves as authors." (Tompkins, 1997 p.26).

I began the year scheduling independent writing three times a week but have recently began scheduling it everyday. During independent reading time the children are given their journals and their writing folders which contain individual ABC charts and picture word banks along with some previous writings. My general rule is that the children write in their journals during whole class independent writing time. This procedure is more manageable with a large class. When the children choose to write during free choice activity time than they may write in their journal or on paper of their choice.

Prior to beginning independent writing I usually model writing myself as stated above. Later, as I hand out the journals to the children I ask them if they know what they will write about today. This casual conversation along with the modeled writing are usually enough to help the children who have difficulties coming up with their own ideas for writing. I also have an idea box containing pictures and small objects for those children who are still having trouble. Generally the children first draw a picture and then write about the picture using what ever writing stage they are at at that time.

While the children are writing I go around the room and briefly conference with a few children, helping them to recall or develop strategies if I see they need help, or simply letting them talk out what they are doing so they became more cognizant of the processes they are using. I also target one or two children to conference with more extensively. For whichever children I have targeted for that day I already have an aim for our conference and a plan based on past observations. This may include helping the child stretch out words for letter sound correspondence or spacing words or spelling words on

out word wall correctly. With another child the aim may be adding more details to her picture or helping her use descriptive language in her sentences. The aim is dependent upon where the targeted child is presently at and where I feel s/he can be brought up to with teacher support or scaffolding.

One scaffolding method that many of the children in my class are benefiting from was found in Tools of the Mind by Elena Bodrova. As the child dictates a story the teacher uses a highlighter to draw a line for each word the child says. They then go back together and fill in the words on the highlighted lines. This is done sentence by sentence. At first it is modeled by the teacher but later on the children are able to use this support themselves, until they are able to develop the focused attention and deliberate memory needed to write without this mediator. (1996 p. 84). I have found this a wonderful method to use with kindergarten children. It helps them better attend to what they want to write, it aids them in spacing word, and because they can concentrate on one word at a time they are better able to use strategies to help them spell individual words.

I find free choice writing to be very valuable. There is no better way to let the children practice all they have been learning about writing. The children themselves all like this time of day. On the few occasions where for one reason or another I skipped free writing at least one child, usually more, would complain that they didn't get to write in their journals today. The children are all proud of the work they have done in their journals and will proudly share them with visitors.

A Brief Note about Language Experiences and Literacy Centers

Two essential pieces not yet mentioned in having a balanced literacy program are Language Experiences and Literacy Centers. Both are necessary components.

- **Language Experiences**

Language experiences are experiences which are used in order to stimulate language in both its oral and written form. The written text that the experience generated

is then used by the children as reading material. The teacher arranges for a specific language experience such as a story read aloud, a field trip, a cooking experience etc., or is open to a naturally accruing experiences, such as the first snowfall of the season. The class or group discusses the experience thereby organizing thoughts and stimulating vocabulary. Then through shared writing or interactive writing the experience is recorded. (Tompkins 1997 p512)

Some of the experience charts I have used in my class this year include. Our trip to the farm; Having second graders read to us; Sharing a Thanksgiving meal with the Preschool Children; and the day the baby mouse decided to come in to our room for a visit. We have also written extensions to, and new ending for, stories we have read during read aloud or shared reading. Writing an experience chart with a large group of children is often time consuming and since the children are so young they often cannot sit long enough to get the chart completed in one day, therefor I often allow two or more days to complete a chart especially if it is done mainly through interactive writing. The time put into these charts are well worth it. The children go back to them over and over again and reread them.

- **Literacy Centers**

Having work centers which are connected to supporting literacy development is very important in early childhood classrooms, It is vital if the teacher child ratio is large. It allows children the time and space needed to practice skills alone and in small groups. It also frees the teacher to conduct small guided reading groups. (Fountas, I & Pinnell, G, 1996, p.46 - 49).

I use a variety of centers in my classroom which the children rotate through in about a weeks time. I keep my morning literacy center time, in which I am assigning the children to specific centers, separate from the afternoon centers in which the children choose where they want to go. The morning centers include the following:

- a pocket chart center where3 or 4 children work together at building a poem by placing individual words on top of the matching words from the previous weeks poem which is written out on sentence strips.

-a listening center where children go to listen to a theme related story on tape and then write or draw about the story.

- a library center where they read leveled books and use the felt board or other story props for retellings.

- a big book center where the children reread big books they are familiar with.

- an ABC center where children use magnetic letters for sorting or to build sight words or their names.

- a poetry center where the children read poems and add poems to their poetry collection

-a printing center where the children go to practice letter formation and practice printing sight words and names.

- a game center in which the children play a game which helps develop reading or writing skills.

-a writing center where the children go to work on writing projects.

Having centers in my classroom is enjoyable for both the children and myself. I am assured that they are working productively and am happy to have the time needed to meet with groups for guided reading; and the children are happy to have the freedom and flexibility that working with a small group in a center provides. As my Kindergartners said when asked about it, "Centers are fun."

Attempting to make it work in a class of 28 four and five year olds with only 1 adult.

My first week teaching Kindergarten has faded into a blur of tears, running noses and loose shoes laces. I remember thinking that first week, why did I ever ask to teach this grade. Yes they're cute but they can't do anything. How will I ever bring them to the level now required by the "new" standards. Then day by day a miraculous event occurs. The children, all the children, take steady steps forward in their literacy development.

Some times its just baby steps but most of the time it's sure, steady, stretch your leg out steps and occasionally it's a true leap.

Just three weeks into school and I notice 5 year old Lillie over at the chart we use everyday to write down information about our star students. Several days earlier, at her request, our class had worked together to write down the sentence, Lillie likes Ms G. When I see her she is looking very closely at the chart and writing something on a piece of paper. After a few minutes she goes back to one of the tables and takes out a crayon. Later that day as I am gathering the children onto the rug with a call back song she walks over and hands me a note with a small pink heart on which she has written the words " likes Ms G." Knowing, that in all likely hood, this is probably Lillie's first attempt at using written language to express her feelings I smile in utter delight. The gathered children want to know what Lillie gave me and I explain that Lillie wrote a note to tell me that she likes me. The children break out in spontaneous applause for us and I am thrilled that I can spend my days with these children.

I recently realized how far my students have come in recognizing the usefulness of writing. The other day when snack time was called the children noticed that I had forgotten to bring in cookies for them. When I said I would try to remember to bring them tomorrow three children called out, write it down so you don't forget. I decided it was a good opportunity for the children to write for a specific, real purpose and asked for a volunteer to write me a note telling me to remember the cookies. Within 10 minutes I received 16 reminders. The following day I brought in the cookies and gave the children who had written the notes credit for my being able to remember. That day I received more notes, some even asking for specific kinds of cookies.

Conclusion

The children in our care are unique individuals with their own needs, learning styles and experiences. If we expect this diverse population to all learn how to read and write then we cannot depend on only one type of program or teaching style to reach them

all. We must use a well rounded approach which is not a slave to the swinging pendulum of educational instruction. Research has substantiated the need to use a balanced approach to teaching reading and writing if we are to develop the full potential of our students. Both reading and writing instruction should be approached with the needs of the children in mind.

Children need to want to read and write. They need to value the use of reading and writing. They need to develop a deep understand of reading and writing and, they need to learn the skills necessary to be able to read and write. Children need to see reading and writing modeled for them. They need to be actively involved in reading and writing and they need to have the correct level of support provided to them dependent upon their current need as in relation to the current task. Additionally children need the time to practice reading and writing. It is obvious that children need a lot in order for them all to succeed and it is also obvious that it is our job to give it to them. Balanced literacy is the only proven method that meets all of these needs.